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ABSTRACT

This round table discussion involved some 50 participants and seven panelists and focused on planning and management for excellence and efficiency in higher education. Basic issues or problems facing higher education were identified including coping with increasing student numbers, raising the quality of teaching, training and research programs, tackling these goals while operating under severe financial constraints, strengthening internationalization in higher education, and securing optimal employability of higher education graduates. The discussion led to the following recommendations for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's proposed Plan of action for research and training on governance, management and administration in higher education: a systematic gathering and dissemination of information on new development in the planning, management, administration and financing of higher education; encouragement of research on planning and management of higher education; an international comparative study on excellence and efficiency in higher education based on micro-level analyses of individual institutions; training programs for key university administrators; encouragement and facilitation of international cooperation in higher education; and research on inter-university cooperation with emphasis on planning, management and implementation. (JB)

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**International Congress on Planning and Management
of Educational Development**

Mexico City, 26-30 March 1990)

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Round Table

**Planning and Management for Excellence and
Efficiency in Higher Education**

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A Round Table on Planning and Management for Excellence and Efficiency in Higher Education, organized within the framework of the International Congress on Planning and Management of Educational Development (Mexico City, 26-30 March 1990) brought together some 50 participants, including 7 panelists on 28 March 1990.

The panelists and the numerous other speakers (there were more than 30 interventions during the three hour discussion) singled out a number of basic issues facing higher education today, which they considered to be relevant for the two major topics of the Round Table, i.e. **excellence** and **efficiency** in higher education:

- a) how to cope with increasing students numbers; that is managing growth and the accompanying increase in diversity and complexity of systems and of institutions of higher education;
- b) how to raise the quality of teaching, training and research programmes;
- c) how to do both (a) and (b) above more efficiently and more effectively, under conditions of severe financial constraints;
- (d) how to secure optimal employability of higher education graduates.

1. Planning and managing for excellence in higher education

At this time of crisis for higher education, the search for excellence is crucial to its role as a main source for highly-skilled human resources development. In adopting strategies for reaching excellence, there are not and there cannot be ready-made rules and measures which would have general applications to all systems and to all institutions. The way to start - the participants agreed - was to develop awareness, among all factors and actors concerned, of the need to attain excellence: decision makers, university administrators, teaching, research and support staff and, not the least, the students themselves.

Mention was made of the following possible approaches and requirements for excellence in higher education:

- the need to redefine certain goals and functions in higher education so as

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to strike the right balance between **expansion** (which is largely determined by external factors - demographic, social, economic and political) and the reinforcement of **quality** and value of teaching, training and research. Many speakers agreed that, while no institution can hope to attain internationally recognized excellence in all areas of scientific endeavour, and that centres of excellence will continue to exist and to strengthen their positions, new centres of excellence can be created through persistent effort and support, and a more balanced international distribution of such centres can be achieved;

- the need to promote and to impress upon public opinion a **new, fresh, image of the university** and of higher education in general, an image in which the traditional values of academe are complemented by an opening up towards the basic needs of society. The central axis of that image resides in the role of higher education institutions as guardians and creators of new values, as critical judges and fomentors of change in all spheres of life. This role is becoming more important than ever before;

- the need to redefine **contents and methods** in higher education, to develop greater responsiveness to societal demands, with due emphasis on the constant and fast changing nature of such demands;

- the need to strengthen **internationalization** in higher education, to develop a spirit of solidarity, of belonging to the world-wide academic and scholarly community. The search for excellence in one's own institution must be complemented by the wish and readiness to help build up excellence in institutions of higher education everywhere, particularly in the developing countries where it is most needed. This spirit of solidarity does not preclude - on the contrary it implies - not only partnership but also the competitiveness and questioning attitude inherent in all true scholarship, in all endeavours to advance science and to search for truth.

The essential condition and the best guarantee for the achievement of excellence in higher education is the reinforcement of autonomy and freedom in research and in teaching. Several participants pointed out that there is a new interpretation of autonomy which is emerging from the present close link between higher education and society. Never before have higher education institutions been required with such stringency to justify their freedom and autonomy by assuming clear responsibilities vis à vis society in the broadest sense of the word.

2. Efficiency in higher education

It is imperative - the participants agreed unanimously - to take bold, imaginative steps in order to improve institutional management and governance in higher education. Universities and other higher education institutions have been, perhaps justifiably, criticized from various quarters for their loose management. What is needed is to develop **managerial professionalism** at various levels of the organizational structure of higher education systems and of their institutions. In this enterprise, better knowledge of how this is achieved in other sectors, including the economic one, acquires particular importance. In fact, in this trading-off of knowledge, universities, as large non-profit institutions may themselves have something to offer from their own experience in imparting a sense of common mission to all their members:

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teachers, students and researchers.

On the other hand, what universities can and must learn from the economic sector are the norms and styles of governance, management and administration which are inherent to large organizations. They imply concern for cost-effectiveness, accountability, constant assessment and evaluation based on clearly-defined performance indicators. The belief that these matters are restricted to spheres of life outside the academic world is no longer tenable. They are increasingly becoming realities and concerns of the every day life of higher education institutions. They must be examined from the specific perspective of higher education so that adequate answers to the problems they pose can be found.

Considerable experience has been gained in various countries in the use of new information technologies in the management and administration of higher education institutions. The strengthening of information systems, of data bases and of various measurable indicators could, with the help of computers, turn into valuable instruments for qualitative analysis of higher education systems and institutions.

It was agreed by most participants that managerial issues affect a wide range of actors in higher education, some of whom had not been aware of their implications in the past. Hence the need to bring about a shift of attitude regarding such concerns. The most convincing way towards developing this new mentality is to undertake soundly based and systematic research on the complex issues involved in the planning, governance and management of higher education institutions.

Recommendations to Unesco :

In the improvement of planning and management of higher education, co-operation at all levels - national, sub-regional, regional and international - is particularly important with regard to the gathering and exchange of **information, to research and to training**. The participants were unanimous in pointing out the role that Unesco can play, especially in this field, and greatly appreciated the Organization's initiative in launching a concerted Plan of action for research and training on governance, management and administration in higher education.

Their recommendations for this Plan included the following:

- to systematically **gather and disseminate information** on new developments, and on techniques and practices for the planning, management, administration and financing of higher education;
- to encourage **research on planning and management** of higher education, and to help establish links and active co-operation among researchers in this field internationally. The creation of co-operation networks at the regional level, and, on that basis, of a possible world-wide network of institutions and individuals actively engaged in research and training programmes, were considered to be areas in which Unesco could bring a most important contribution, acting in close co-operation with specialized NGOs and IGOs;

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- to undertake an international, **comparative study on excellence and efficiency in higher education**, based on micro-level analyses of individual institutions, as well as on broader approaches aimed at identifying new developments and trends at the national, subregional, regional and international levels. Particular attention should be paid not only to cases of recognized success, but also to cases of systems and institutions which encounter difficulties. One other topic for comparative study could refer to ways and means for securing non-governmental financing for higher education, including also an analysis of the implications of privatization for the future of higher education, its potential benefits and also its potential hazards;

- to organize **training programmes** (workshops, seminars, modular courses, etc.) for key university administrators and to help set up expertise and institutional self-supporting mechanisms for systematic and permanent training at such levels, acting in close co-operation with national authorities in charge of higher education as well as with international governmental and non-governmental organizations;

- to encourage and to facilitate **international co-operation** in higher education, through direct institutional arrangements and through sub-regional, regional and inter-regional networks;

- to undertake **research on inter-university co-operation**, with particular emphasis on the planning, management and implementation that such co-operation involves.

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